

VICE-PRESIDENT ON AFRICA TOUR

Indian armed forces may train Botswana troops

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TRAINING TEAMS of the Indian Army and Indian Air Force may soon be brought back to Botswana to train members of the Botswana Defence Force. The possibility of bringing back the training teams was discussed during a one-on-one discussion held in Gaborone on Thursday between Vice-President M Venkaiah Naidu and Vice-President of Botswana Slumber Tsogwane, according to Secretary (Economic Relations), Ministry of External Affairs, T S Tirumurti. The discussion between the two vice-presidents was followed by delegation-level talks between the two nations.

India had training teams in



Venkaiah Naidu at an exhibition in Gaborone, Botswana. PTI

Botswana between 1978 and 2012. In fact, Tirumurti said that India was the "very first country" that Botswana had approached just a year after they set up the Botswana Defence Force. In 2014, a memorandum of understanding was signed to bring the Indian teams back to the African

nation, and now "we are in the process of negotiating some of the changes which need to be incorporated" in the MoU, he said.

Tirumurti mentioned that Naidu "proposed" a solution to send the training teams under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation bilateral

assistance programme of the Indian government. This was "welcomed" by Botswana, and India is "confident that we will be able to bring our training teams back" and Botswana is "very keen" for them. India is, he said, "very happy that this is an important outcome of the discussions with the Botswana side".

India expressed happiness over Botswana's "continuous support in multilateral fora, reflecting the enduring spirit of friendship between two countries" and both sides agreed that the UN Security Council "needs to be reformed to make it more representative in response to the geo-political realities" of the 21st century, Tirumurti said.

During his talks with Tsogwane, Naidu referred to the "stable democratic environment which Botswana provides and

appreciated its important role in the context of Southern African Development Community," and his counterpart from Botswana "warmly recalled India's contribution to the freedom struggle of many Southern African Nations, including Botswana".

It announced willingness to join the International Solar Alliance, which, he said, should happen "very soon". Copper mining was discussed between the delegates of India and Botswana. Another "important" area for cooperation is health-care, Tirumurti said.

Naidu is on a three-nation tour in Africa. After Botswana, he will visit Zimbabwe and Malawi, taking the total number of African nations to 29 toured either by the President, Vice-President or the Prime Minister in the last four years.